





JORDAN KANTOR

Developments in the field of image-making technology in the last century have presented extraordinary challenges to painting practice. As new modes of representation crept into the purview of brushwork on stretched canvas, painters had to do some conceptual soul searching. Kantor utilizes his fluid understanding of this history, plucking reproduced and widely disseminated images and appropriating them to his own ends through extensive cropping and alteration. He calls upon the challenges that photography and film have historically set before painting and uses the terms of that struggle to frame a contemporary story that is not just about the history of representation, but also the specific histories of individual representations.

In translating one format to another (from film, photography, digital screen capture, X-ray, or photocopy to oil painting on canvas), Kantor points to the specific structural nature of each mode of representation. One of his largest works, *Untitled (Surgery)* (2006–7; pls. 12, 15), is an appropriation of a photograph that he found reproduced as a two-page spread in a book. Kantor photocopied the image, reducing it to blurred-edged black and white, replete with a telltale photocopy-induced line streaking down the center. Now many degrees of separation away from its source material, the fundamental subject of this painting is not the vision of an operating room, as it was in the image, but rather the evidenced life of that image and its structure, dramatically shifted through circulation.

Untitled (The Bar) (2007; pl. 13), Kantor's most legible act of appropriation, takes as its source Edouard Manet's iconic painting *A Bar at the Folies-Bergères* (1882), a work that is all about upending traditional notions of illusionistic representation. Kantor's re-presentation of this work calls upon the fact of vision as subject matter as well as the history of the painting itself as a subject of prolific critical discourse. Through Kantor's lens the image becomes more significant as a point of art historical fascination than as a specific composition. Kantor appropriated the X-ray of Manet's painting, an artifact that represents an attempt to get beyond the original work's surface. Now manipulated by technology, the widely reproduced image that Kantor paints offers a view not available via natural vision.

Kantor further addresses the limitations of vision in a series of works based on filmic documentation (now converted to digital media and captured as individual stills) of Joseph Kittinger's historic skydiving missions (see pl. 14). As Kittinger tumbled through space, the camera strapped to him was hit repeatedly by the glare of the sun peeking around the edge of the earth. Kantor paints these freeze-framed moments, capturing the flares—an effect seen only when one looks through a camera lens, never via unmediated vision. The paintings function as documents of photographic signs. Beyond this, they appropriate the cinematic structure of the original footage. Displayed as a series, the slightly differing compositions, like the imagined spread-out pages of an animation flip book, narrate the course of a figure falling through space.

In scavenging for source material Kantor relies on the accessibility of images enabled by the novel terms of digital media. Given this practice his subject matter is certainly bound to history, yet the works are also extraordinary markers of the specific cultural language of his own era. His project gains new relevance given the broad sweep of digital-image dissemination and its impact on the lives of representations: images can be more easily seen, used, altered, and dispersed today than at any other moment in history. Significantly, Kantor's work continues the great debate about the relevance of painting in the face of other unique modes of representation. In his practice painting becomes a great equalizer rather than a hierarchical powerhouse. As everything ends up as painting, the medium sutures the fissures between the source materials. —AG